

Tayap language

Tayap (also spelled **Taiap**; called **Gapun** in earlier literature, after the name of the village in which it is spoken) is an endangered Papuan language spoken by less than 50 people in Gapun village of Marienberg Rural LLG in East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea (4.028746°S 144.50304°E, located just to the south of the Sepik River mouth near the coast).^[4]^[5] It is being replaced by the national language and lingua franca Tok Pisin.

Contents
History
Sociolinguistics
Classification
Phonology
Pronouns
Grammar
Nouns
Gender
Lexicon
Vertebrates
Invertebrates
Sago-related vocabulary
Clan names
See also
Notes
References

Tayap	
 <div><i>Tayap mer</i></div>	
Native to	Papua New Guinea
Region	Gapun village, Marienberg Rural LLG, East Sepik Province
Native speakers	less than 50 (2020) ^[1]
Language family	Unclassified, language isolate or Torricelli ^[2] <div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Sepik Coast <ul style="list-style-type: none">Tayap </div>
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	gpn
Glottolog	taia1239 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/taia1239) ^[3]
 <div><div><div><div><div><div></div><div><div>Tayap</div></div></div></div></div></div></div>	
Coordinates: 4.028746°S 144.50304°E<div><div></div></div>	

History

The first European to describe Tayap was Georg Höltker, a German missionary-linguist, in 1937. Höltker spent three hours in the village and collected a word list of 125 words, which he published in 1938. He wrote that “it will be awhile before any other researcher ‘stumbles across’ Gapun, if only because of the small chances of worthwhile academic yields in this tiny village community, and also because of the inconvenient and arduous route leading to this linguistic island”.^[6]

Höltker's list was all that was known about Tayap in literature until the early 1970s, when the Australian linguist Donald Laycock travelled around the lower Sepik to collect basic vocabulary lists that allowed him to identify and propose classifications of the many languages spoken there. Tayap and its speakers have been

extensively studied by linguistic anthropologist Don Kulick since the mid-1980s. The language is described in detail in *Tayap Grammar and Dictionary: The Life and Death of a Papuan Language* and in *A Death in the Rainforest: How a Language and a Way of Life Came to an End in Papua New Guinea*.^{[7][8]}

Until WWII, when Japanese soldiers occupied the area and caused the villagers to flee into the rainforest, Gapun was located on a hill that several thousand years earlier had been an island in the sea that receded and formed the lower Sepik River. This indicates that Tayap may be the descendant of an ancient, autochthonous language that was already in place before the various waves of migration from the inland to the coast began occurring thousands of years ago.^[9] Foley (2018) also speculates that Tayap could have been part of a larger language family that was spoken on the island before the arrival of Lower Sepik speakers. As the coastline moved further northeast, Lower Sepik speakers migrated from the foothills into the new land areas created by the receding waters.^[10]

Sociolinguistics

Up to 2018, Gapun was the only village where Tayap is spoken, although some speakers of the language also lived in neighboring villages such as Wongan and Watam, having moved there because of marriage or as a result of conflicts over land or sorcery in Gapun. However, in 2018, Gapun village was burned down and abandoned due to violence among households. The former residents fled to the nearby villages of Wongan (3.999326°S 144.532123°E), Watam (3.906592°S 144.545246°E), and Boroi.^{[11]:16}

Gapun villagers associate Tok Pisin with Christianity, modernity and masculinity, and they associate Tayap with paganism, "backwardness", disruptive femininity and childish stubbornness. As a result, Tayap is being increasingly replaced by Tok Pisin.^[12]

Unlike the neighboring patrilineal Lower Sepik-Ramu speakers, Tayap speakers are matrilineal.^[12] Tayap is typologically very different from the neighboring Lower Sepik-Ramu languages.

Tayap also has many loanwords from the Kopar and Adjora languages.^{[11]:349}

Classification

Tayap is not related to the neighboring Lower Sepik languages, though a relationship to the more distant Torricelli family has been proposed.^[2]

In the 1970s Australian linguist Donald Laycock classified Tayap (which he called "Gapun") as a sub-phylum of the Sepik-Ramu language phylum, on the basis of Georg Hölzker's 1938 word list and a few verb paradigms that Laycock gathered from two speakers.^[13]

Kulick and Terrill (2019) found no evidence that Tayap is related to the Lower Sepik languages, another branch of the erstwhile Sepik-Ramu phylum. They conclude that Tayap is a language isolate, though they do not compare it to other language families, as would be required to establish Tayap as an independent language family. Comparative vocabulary demonstrates the lexical aberrancy of Tayap as compared to the surrounding Lower Sepik languages: e.g. *sene* 'two' (cf. proto-Lower Sepik **ri-pa-*), *neke* 'ear' (**kwand-*), *ngino* 'eye' (**tambri*), *tar* 'hear' (**and-*), *min* 'breast' (**nɨŋgay*), *nɨŋg* 'bone' (**sariŋamp*), *malɨt* 'tongue' (**minɨŋ*), *mayar* 'leaf' (**nɨmɤramp*) among the Holman *et al.* (2008) ranking of the Swadesh list. Cultural vocabulary such as 'village', 'canoe', 'oar', and 'lime', as well as the basic words *awin* 'water' (cf. **arɨm*) and *a* 'eat' (cf. **am* ~ **amb*), may be shared with Lower Sepik languages. The word *karep* 'moon' is shared specifically with Kopar (*karep*). However, most basic vocabulary items have no apparent cognates in surrounding languages.^[14]

Phonology

The Tayap consonants are:^[11]

p	t		k
^m b	ⁿ d		^ŋ g
m	n		ŋ
	s		
	r		
w		j	

Tayap has 6 vowels, which are:^[11]

i		u
e	ɨ	o
a		

Pronouns

Tayap pronouns are:^[11]

	sg	pl
1	ŋa	yim
2	yu	yum
3m	ŋɨ	ŋgɨ
3f	ŋgu	ŋgɨ

Grammar

Like many Sepik languages, Tayap is a synthetic language. Verbs are the most elaborated area of the grammar. They are complex, fusional and massively suppletive, with opaque verbal morphology including unpredictable conjugation classes, both in terms of membership and formal marking.

There is a fundamental distinction in verbal morphology between realis and irrealis stems and suffixes. Grammatical relations are marked by verbal suffixes, which distinguish Subject/Agent (S/A) and Object (O). In some conjugations S/A is marked by discontinuous morphemes. Free pronouns and noun phrases mark the ergative case (A) compared to unmarked forms for the absolutive (S/O). As in many Papuan languages which have an ergative case, the ergative marker is optional and is frequently omitted.

Nouns

Nouns generally do not mark number themselves, although there is a small class of largely human nouns which mark plural, and a smaller class which mark dual. These categories, where marked, are largely marked by partial or full suppletion. Oblique cases, largely local, are marked by clitics attached to the end of

the oblique NP.^[11]

Gender

Like many languages of the Sepik-Ramu basin (particularly the Sepik languages), Taiap has masculine and feminine genders.

There are two genders, masculine and feminine, marked not on the noun itself but on deictics, the ergative marker, suppletive verbal stems and verbal affixes. The unmarked, generic form of all nouns, including animate nouns, even humans, is feminine: however, a male referent may be masculine. Another criterion is size and shape: long, thin and large referents tend to be masculine; short, stocky and small referents tend to be feminine. This type of gender-assignment system is typical of the Sepik region. Gender is only ever marked in the singular, never in the dual or plural.

Lexicon

Selected Tayap words from Kulick and Terrill (2019: 442-454).

Vertebrates

gloss	Tayap
pig	mbor
domesticated dog	nje
tree possum, <u>cuscus</u>	enamb
ground possum	síw
<u>bandicoot</u>	sasik
rat, mouse	ngabugar, kokosik, njip, mangɛ̃m
<u>sugar glider</u>	ngesiŋe
<u>flying fox</u>	njakep
bat	sumusumu
<u>tree kangaroo</u> species	kanuŋg
crocodile	orem
snake	aram
snake, types of	ambonor; arambwar; aramŋgor; atemb; karewa; kanakai aramŋgor; nɛ̃ŋɛ̃r aram; pake; and
venomous snake species	mbumjor; kombɛ̃n
lizard, types of	agin; akirónda; amanep; mbutak; ngararik; ngogrodak; ngurbewat; kurbi; masukondep; onjaŋnoŋor; tapetak
frog	pasákeke
large brown water bullfrog	uráŋgeba
tadpole	mbókókɛ̃r < kókɛ̃r 'head'
fish	ngomar
freshwater fish	aiyo, ndɛ̃dɛ̃maŋ, ngomákókɛ̃r, orɛ̃nd, semb
catfish	tokine
large eel	ngem

Invertebrates

gloss	Tayap
shrimp	sasu
small shrimp	sasupat
freshwater lobster	keymare
crab	kosep, ngarorak, sasápoke
hermit crab	pisik
shelled slug	kandip
clam, types of	eporaŋ, oyaŋ
mosquito	at
mosquito, type of	aiawangar; indagawr; iurok; mbunbun; m̄ir̄iŋa at; njakepma ar̄it; njeyew̄ir at; ngurpan
ant	s̄iw̄ir
ant, type of	kandap; ngugrub; kambobai; rewitoto; s̄iw̄ird̄id̄im; s̄iw̄irkararkarar
termite	agu; kamus
spider	tom̄iktom̄ik
spider of the ground	tom̄iktom̄ik sumbwaŋa
house spider	tom̄iktom̄ik pat̄ir̄iŋa (lit. 'spider of the house')
centipede	yandum
firefly	ngudum
bee	mbadiŋ
bee, type of	kunemb; arúmbatak; metawr
butterfly, moth	mumuk
caterpillars without fur	at̄ir
caterpillars with fur	n̄iŋgasin
beetle	tutumb
beetle, type of	arawer; mbirkraw onko; ngabugrip
beetle grub, type of	k̄im̄ir̄ik; kom̄i; urukuruk
wasp	k̄ikri
fly	arúmbatak
biting horsefly	tetei
blue fly	arúmbatak wasow (literally 'fly death')
fruit fly, gnat	ipipir
scorpion	katáwa
millipede	kakámatik
walking stick	nekan
praying mantis	ngat (also 'cassowary')
worm	kekékato

earwig	ikinŋan yandum
wood louse	tɪtɪpreŋ
cicada	ŋgaratgarat, kikik
grasshopper	njojok, njajak
cockroach	sasawraŋ, numbutik
bedbug	ndedenŋ
flea	itum
louse	pakɪnd
leech	mbímaŋ
mite	kandap

Sago-related vocabulary

gloss	Tayap
flour	muna
a kind of rubbery pancake	tamwai
broken pot shard	pambram
tennis ball-sized sago chunk	muna kokɪr, which literally means ‘sago head’
fire	paŋgɪp
congeal	munakumund
sago jelly	mum
sago soup	wawan
large chisel	makor or yasuk
tree	wot
crown of the palm	mar
sawdust	tawar
long funnel	iko or ndadum
coconut fiber strainer	waris
palm fronds	kondew
cakes of sago flour	munakatar
small benches made of branches	kokɪparaŋ
short sago-pounder made of a single piece of wood	yasuk
basket	saiput

In Tayap, a felled sago palm tree can be divided into 7 parts. The Tayap names are listed below, from the base (*wot*) to the crown (*mar*).^{[11]:454}

- *wot*
- *wotŋa orom*
- *orom*

- *ndagña orom*
- *ndag*
- *marña orom*
- *mar*

The word *orom* means ‘in the vicinity of’.

Clan names

There are five Tayap clans:

gloss	Tayap
crocodile	orem
dog	nje
parrot	karar
pig	mbor
flying fox	njakep

See also

- [Linguistic anthropology#Identity and intersubjectivity](#)
- [Gapun](#)
- [Don Kulick](#)

Notes

1. [Tayap \(https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/gpn/\)](https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/gpn/) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
2. [New Guinea World -- Taiap \(https://sites.google.com/site/newguineaworld/families/torricelli-ran-ge-sepik-coast/sepik-coast/taiap\)](https://sites.google.com/site/newguineaworld/families/torricelli-ran-ge-sepik-coast/sepik-coast/taiap)
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9. Ross, Malcolm (2005), "Pronouns as a preliminary diagnostic for grouping Papuan languages", in Pawley, Andrew; Attenborough, Robert; Golson, Jack; Hide, Robin (eds.), *Papuan pasts: cultural, linguistic and biological histories of Papuan-speaking peoples*, Pacific Linguistics 572, Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, pp. 17–65
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11. Kulick, Don; Terrill, Angela (2019). *A Grammar and Dictionary of Tayap: The Life and Death of a Papuan Language* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=VXWcDwAAQBAJ>). Pacific Linguistics 661. Boston/Berlin: Walter de Gruyter Inc. [ISBN 9781501512209](#).
12. Kulick (1992)
13. Laycock, D.C. (1973), *Sepik Languages - Checklist and Preliminary Classification*, Pacific Linguistics B-25, Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, [doi:10.15144/pl-b25](#) (<https://doi.org/10.15144%2Fpl-b25>)
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